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# VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES

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## **Abstract**

The present "post modern" socio-cultural modalities and the restrictions of the economic globalization lead us to reflect about the configuration of the transformations in the Vocational Guidance, committed to the concepts of "freedom", "epistemological knowledge", "competences of the subject and new roles of the school. This first exploratory incursion if the research has the purpose of retrieving the concept of freedom from the existential philosophers Heidegger and Sartre and of introducing the subject of "competences" from the social theory of Habermas. The aim is to establish new bonds between the Vocational Guidance and the above-mentioned philosophical lineaments: the freedom of the subjects and the possibility of development of those "competences" that allow to establish social, ethical and epistemological interrelations in the sphere of the Vocational Guidance, that promote a greater solidarity facing the "era of emptiness" of the post-modernity supported by Lipovestky.

**Key Words:** freedom to choose; competences; vocational guidance; postmodernity.

This work corresponds to "advance" of the above mentioned research that is being carried out in three stages:

## **First stage**

Study of the relationships between the Vocational Guidance and the proposals and philosophical statements that refer to a double problem: the "vocation" as the subjects freedom to choose his or her labour future and the development of competences as rational abilities inherent to the subject, abilities that are shown in the cognitive, linguistic, interactive and communication spheres. In this report of "Avance" such problems: "freedom to chose" and "development of competences" will be studied in the first case from philosophical ambits related to statements of the two representative of the philosophy of the existence Heidegger and Sartre, and in the second case, to the competences from the philosophy of the communicative action held by philosopher Habermas.

## **Second Stage**

It will refer to the competences in the educational and labour field. In regard to the matter, works published by Argentine pedagogues as Cullon, Filmus, Braslavsky, Camilloni and Riquelme will be object of analysis and reflection.

## **Third Stage**

The final stage will try to rebuild the theoretical results of the research as of the possible correlation with “field work” that can support or not some of the exploratory thesis expressed in the respective philosophical, epistemological – educational fields. The methodology is quali-quantitative.

### **Theoretical considerations in the first stage of the research.**

Philosophy and education maintain –and historically have maintained- a chose relationship through the “Educational Philosophy”. Many important philosophers, since Plato to the contemporaries as Dewey, Dilthey and Spranger have written valuable studies about education. As far as it concerned, the Vocational Guidance is related to the philosophy too. Here we will speak about the interrelations that raise between the “freedom to chose” and “the construction and development of competences”, on one hand and the labour choice of the students from a good “vocational guidance” of the subjects, especially in the environment of the school institution.

The focal point of this work refers to the philosophical problems of the “free choice” of subject with regard to his or her future labour and professional ambitions and to the importance of the formation of the Competences of the student in the Vocational Guidance. In that respect, it is necessary to reassert the role of the school as transmitter of epistemologically valuable knowledge that can be adapted to the limited job vacancies of the neoliberal society.

Briefly, this work will present some statements about the concepts of freedom in the frame of Heidegger (1951) and Sartre thought, existentialist philosophers of the first half of the XX century and will present the theme of the competences, according to Habermas social theory (1987).

The world community expresses itself through different cultural, epistemological and moral nets, but in all cases such nets do not depend on the competences that have been developed by the subjects, starting from influences that come from the Vocational Guidance. Even though the Guidance is an activity that is needed during the whole life -as states Jenschke, former director of the International Society of Social and Vocational Guidance (AIOGP) “the early discovery of the Vocational Guidance contributes to the best strengthening of the future action”.(1)

The ignorance of the importance of the Vocational Guidance may lead to a cultural, scientific and technological task that cannot strengthen the subject's personality. Today the discovery of such vocations is being upset by socio-cultural and economic factors expressed by postmodernity and globalization that generate a major dispersal. The educational and labour exclusion has produced cultural parameters characterized by a desintegration of moral norms in the socio cultural ambit, the economic globalization upsets important sectors of the development in some regions and countries. However such situations of conflict may allow us to reflect about the configuration of the other fields of Guidance involved in a return to two meaningful spaces in the plane of the subjectivity: "possibility of choosing" (Heidegger, 1951), "opening of a committed freedom (Sartre, 1957) and development of the "interactive and rationally communicative competences" (Habermas, 1987).

#### **A) The Guidance and the philosophical condition related to the freedom of the subject**

One of the tasks to fulfil by the educational community is to offer vocational possibilities directed to promote efficient and free insertions in the labour world to its graduated. From this last perspective, this research favours the opening of the concept of "freedom" in the frame of Vocational Guidance by virtue of the deep cultural, sociopolitic and economic changes that take place in the present neoliberal society.

To establish a new relationship between "freedom" and "capacity to choose" of each subject, in what regards to his or her own troubles, motivations and interests is an arduous task within school activities. "Freedom" and "election" are very meaningful for the philosophy of the existence; from such philosophical proposals of the existencialism, the anglosaxon philosopher Beck (1973) has developed his conception of Vocational Guidance. (2)

In the history of Vocational Guidance, during the decades of the 60`s and 70`s, the idea that Vocational Guidance had to have a basic focal point consisting in philosophical basic was supported (Beck, 1973). At that stage, the influence of existentialist European philosophers was very relevant; in this work we have taken into account some meaningful philosophical frames of important philosophers as Heidegger and Sartre.

A first statement formulates the condition of the human subject as "existence", "to be there" or "existence thrown into the world" (Heidegger, 1951). The subject could dispose of his or her freedom existentially, "freedom" that evolves in a "determined time" (the existent is to be for death). Heidegger in his work "Being and Time" (1951) holds, about the existentialist condition of man the following:

“that because in each case “being here” (or existence) is his or her possibility, this entity, in his being, can elect himself, win himself or lose himself or never win himself or only appear to win”. (3)

This opening of freedom responds to the exercise of responsible elections held by Sartre, French philosopher who in his short work *The Existentialism is Humanism* (1947) affirms that the election that every existence carries out gestates itself from what could be validated by the others.

“The existent has the freedom to elect himself and by doing this, he chooses the world he would like for the others” (4)

Although the Sartre statement present a moral principle of subjective character, it is a question of election in a world in which should prevail the freedom “to choose oneself” and “to choose the world one would like for oneself”, affirmation that can include a humanistic position. However, in other works Sartre (1957) dedicates rigorous studies to the analysis of the difficulties that appear in the “communication between existences” due to the power of “...the look of the other at me” (...) “look that wants to turn me into its object into its object of dominion”.

However, in the first text above mentioned, the French philosopher gives an important space to freedom and possibility of choosing of every subject; it is this election as an act of freedom what may have a meaningful role in the Vocational Guidance (Beck 1973).

In the present postmodern period, Sartre's proposal has been overshadowed by individualistic positions and many-sided seductions of the daily life that manifest themselves in the breaking of valves in the consumer society. Such seductions, in a world in which prevails the ephemeral, have been accepted by the postmodern philosopher Lipovetsky (1995), who holds up:

“The consumption forces the individual to take charge of himself, makes him responsible, it an unavoidable participation system (...) the consumption era manifests itself as a personalizing agent, that is to say of responsabilization of the individuals, compelling them to choose and change the elements of his or her way of life”. (5)

It is convenient to remember that such consumerism –in large areas of the Earth- is a privilege that benefit only a few segments of society because there are lots of people

overlooked and they do not even have the possibility of an election and much less the possibility of an election of the “consumerist” type.

As the millennium dawns, what should be encouraged from the Guidance is to overcome the post modern seduction that come from the “split subject” or from a “consumerist subject” or “fragmented subject”, to rebuild a reflective, critical, ethical and solidary subject who uses his freedom responsibly, who builds himself from the intersubjective and social history and who projects himself by his possibility of election.

The Vocational Guidance should on the world and on himself to analyse the troubles, and ambitions of each one, as a first step to follow in the search of rebuilding a “freedom conciliated with the social”, that returns to universal values of justice, equity, commonweal and human rights. It is a question of guiding the youth towards the constitution of a critical subject that, when he chooses, “elects the world he wants to share with the others”, that is to say, socially committed with freedom and directed towards the development of his abilities or competences.

### **B) The Guidance and the development of competences in the subject.**

The theme of “competences” may be approached from several perspectives: philosophical, psychological, pedagogic, linguistic, technical, economic, labour, etc. In this work the concept of competences settles itself from a philosophical view supported by the Habermas thought (1987), who studies the competences as

“...capacities `cuasi a priori` of the universal rules that generate the linguistic, cognitive, interactive and communicative competences”. (6)

It is a question of the universal condition of the subject that are validated in a specific cultural field from his capacity to generate universal rules, that is to say valid for all the subjects. Such constructions of “competences” express themselves in the space that with the inclusion of empirical data, gives shape not only to the symbolic-cultural formations of the “social world “systematic world” that responds to the economic and political space of he institutionalised powers. A society achieves a full correspondence when a balance between both conceptions is established (Habermas, 1987). In a balanced society there is no room for the underprivileged or excluded. Precisely in this work we relate this philosophical capacity of the subject to his possibility of achieving the fulfilment of his or her aspirations and his or her personal fulfilment, helped by the vocational and Educational Guidance in a specific social and cultural medium, this space may be the school through its different areas and ways of teaching.

In the work “Conocimiento e Interés” (1983) (translation: Knowledge and Interest), Habermas makes reference to the “emancipation interest” that corresponds to the third and last relation between “knowledge and interests”, thesis whose central support affirms that “all knowledge carries with it an interest”. We think that the emancipation of the subject –emancipatory interest- may reach major plenitude when he achieves his rational, reflective and communicative condition.

### **C) The Guidance: freedom, competences and schooling perspectives**

The new postmodern sociocultural forms and the economic globalization restrictions make us reflect about the configuration of the new spheres of Guidance that should be committed to the present interpretations of the “freedom” concept, to the “epistemological knowledge” and to the “competences” of the subject who is being educated. It is necessary to carry out an appeal to the practical task of the pedagogical actions in their secondary studies the ones that are finishing their secondary studies and have to make a choice about the career they are going to follow.

It is an arduous task within the school activities to establish a new relation between “freedom” and “capacity of election” of each subject –regarding his or her own troubles, motivations and interest. Consequently, what should be encouraged from the Guidance is to overcome the postmodern conception about the “subject at risk” or “the deconstruction of the subject to rebuild a critical, ethical, solidary subject that reflects and uses responsibly his or her freedom, builds himself from his or her intersubjective and personal history and projects himself temporarily through his or her possibility of election.

The reflection about the world and the self reflection about the actions everyone is a first step to follow in this search of reconstruction of a freedom reconciled with the social, that does not limit its responsibility to the choice of “consumption products” but returns to the universal values of justice, equity, common good and human rights. It is a question of guiding students towards the constitution of a critical subject socially committed to the freedom and directed to the development of his or her capacities or “competences, that when he elects, he elects the prospect of fulfilling his or her ambitions. It is convenient to underline that although in their entirety the “competences” are plural, each one of them has a connotation in singular, that means that in each case it is a question of a universal condition that is validated in a specific cultural sphere.

Considering that in the developing societies –as Argentina- there is a complete disconnection between the “social world of life” and the “systemic world”, our proposal has to do with a change in the intersubjective relations in the plane of Guidance from school education –with prevalence of relations based on freedom, solidarity and knowledge– of decisive importance for the scientific-technological formation, the community, the

deepening of the democracy and the labour qualification of its inhabitants. The Educational Guidance should encourage the development of such capacities and in this instance it is possible to establish the first parameters that demonstrate certain inclinations of the pupils toward one or other of those capacities.

#### **D) Vocational Guidance and transmission of knowledge in the scholastic institution.**

The school management carried out by teachers and other members of the “educational community” committed to their schooling task –may promote a return of the school to its sphere of epistemological specificity. From this perspective Lyotard (1991) holds that in the postindustrial society.

“...the knowledge is and will be affected by two main functions: the research and the transmission of knowledge. We know that the knowledge has become, in the last decades, the most important source of production”

The scholastic institution fulfils a major role in the transmission of knowledge –in its different levels, cycles and forms of teaching. The quality in the didactic transposition corresponds to the efficient mediation of knowledge carried out by the teaching staff of each establishment, that confers major benefits to the teaching with didactic resources of high technology.

From a new configuration of the scholastic institution meanwhile it rebuilds itself as a center of transmission, production and circulation of knowledge- and gives up the fulfilment of welfare tasks, as it is the case of free school-kitchens during teaching time-, the development of the capacities of the subject so that he or she achieves the best performance in the different spheres of knowledge should be encouraged.

The people who are being educated achieve a major level of development by the school action, that is to say, that capacity to generate universal rules (competences) is channelled in the logic of the production of knowledge, that include the creativity in the sphere of arts and literature, the reflective participation in the theoretical –scientific subjects and the best labour and professional qualification that facilitates their insertion in the labour world.

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